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Friday, 9 November 2001, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

Adoption of the agenda and organization of work: reports of the General Committee

Third report of the General Committee (A/56/250/Add.2)

The President: I should like to draw the attention of the representatives to the third report of the General Committee (A/56/250/Add.2).

In paragraph 1 of this report, the General Committee decided to recommend to the General Assembly that agenda item 169, "Administration of justice at the United Nations", be allocated to the Fifth Committee, on the understanding that any decision requiring amending the statute of the United Nations Administrative Tribunal or relating to the establishment of a higher-level jurisdiction would be subject to the advice of the Sixth Committee.

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to allocate agenda item 169, "Administration of justice at the United Nations", to the Fifth Committee, on the understanding that any decision requiring amending the statute of the United Nations Administrative Tribunal or relating to the establishment of a higher-level jurisdiction would be subject to the advice of the Sixth Committee?

It was so decided.

The President: In paragraph 2 of its report, the General Committee decided, with regard to agenda item 12, "Report of the Economic and Social Council", to recommend to the General Assembly that the report of the Economic and Social Council, as a whole, be considered directly in plenary meeting, on the understanding that the Second, Third and Fifth Committees would remain seized of the chapters already referred to them for their usual consideration.

May I take it that the General Assembly decides, with regard to agenda item 12, "Report of the Economic and Social Council", to consider directly in plenary meeting the report of the Economic and Social Council as a whole, on the understanding that the Second, Third and Fifth Committees remain seized of the chapters already referred to them for their usual consideration?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 25 (*continued*)

United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations

Report of the Secretary-General (A/56/523)

Draft resolution (A/56/L.3)

Mr. Negroponte (United States of America): The indiscriminate brutality of the 11 September terrorist attacks represented the antithesis of all that we would hope to achieve in a dialogue of civilizations, if by "civilization" we mean a mode of communal existence

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that expresses a people's finest qualities and greatest gifts and blessings.

Attempting to don Islam's mantle, the terrorists argued that they pursued a holy war whose premise was the non-existence of another people. But these men did not — they could not — represent Islam. Instead, criminal actions such as theirs reflected utter alienation and hatred — a judgement that innocent people had no right to live, a unilateral decision to incinerate thousands of citizens of many lands and many faiths. Men and women died. Jews, Christians and Moslems died. Arabs, Asians, Africans, Europeans and Latin Americans died.

This was neither "dialogue" nor was it "civilization", but it unquestionably adds urgency to our mission here today. While we may be sure that the perpetrators of 11 September will receive justice, questions remain: How can we harmonize differing perceptions of the world's glorious diversity, how can we ensure that the savage impulse to negate the very existence of another people is consigned to humanity's past? To look at these questions within the framework of dialogue and civilization captures much that is essential to our task, and we are appreciative that the Secretary-General has raised our efforts to such a high level.

To begin, the greater danger confronting us in the world today is not that we speak in different languages, but that we don't always listen in *any* language. The art of hearing one another, the commitment to respond to what one is told: these are the fundamental dynamics of dialogue. And dialogue — two-way communication — is of supreme importance in attempting to address the vast complexity of civilizations that have evolved over the course of centuries and, indeed, millennia. For civilization is not static. Civilization is alive; it is the basis upon which dialogue with others is possible. Our civilizations are our voice and meaning; they are capacity for harmonious exchange; they are our capacity for mutual understanding.

The United States, of course, is a manifestation of Western civilization, with deep cultural roots in the ancient world of the Mediterranean, but it is much more than that. During the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, immigrants arrived not only from the parts of Western Europe traditionally associated with the American population, but also from regions in Eastern and Southern Europe and Asia. By the early twentieth century, these patterns had yielded to larger numbers of immigrants coming from Latin America, Asia and Africa.

And many of those who ultimately constituted the United States were not, of course, immigrants at all. They were slaves, or they were indigenous peoples whose arrival in North America predated European settlement by many centuries. These are the darkest facts in our history. Change came slowly. Six hundred thousand died in our Civil War as we put an end to slavery; the struggle for racial equality and civil rights extended through the twentieth century.

More remains to be done, but the difficulties of diversity have given definition to our best efforts and most inspiring accomplishments. *E pluribus unum* is a motto that captures the American experience well.

Here in New York we have seen the rise of Little Italy, Chinatown and the phenomenon sometimes referred to as "Moscow on the Hudson". On our West Coast, California public schools offer instruction in over 80 different languages, while Los Angeles possesses one of the largest Spanish-speaking populations of any city anywhere. In a world that is globalized, we ourselves are globalized. There is a portion of agony and vertigo in this, but a greater portion of treasure. The dialogue among civilizations as we practice it in the United States is an effort to reconcile what we believe and do together and what we believe and do alone. We are all Americans, but we are also Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Moslems and Hindus. There are 1,200 mosques in the United States. There are Buddhist temples. There are large communities of Sikhs and Eastern Orthodox Christians. This, today, in the year 2001, is America, and we are grateful for the constant challenge to be tolerant, the constant challenge to demonstrate mutual respect, the constant challenge to learn something new from human traditions and beliefs and ethnicities that are very old.

Today, in the shadow of 11 September, the same challenge confronts the world at large. Religion-based and communitarian conflict clouds the dawn of the twenty-first century. Some misguided individuals believe they can manipulate national and cultural values as if their actions took place behind a wall, but they delude themselves if they think their deeds are not seen and their words not heard.

In our modern, globalized world, sewn together with the threads of immigration, economic

interdependence and communication, no civilization — no culture, religion or ethnicity — can live in isolation. What is not videotaped is faxed. What is not broadcast on radio is transmitted on the Internet. This is good. It gives us all the opportunity to have a sincere, genuine dialogue about the role our civilizations can play in enriching the future of mankind.

The Tehran Declaration of May 1999, issued at the Islamic Symposium on Dialogue among Civilizations, stated among its general principles respect for the dignity and equality of all human beings; genuine acceptance of cultural diversity; and mutual respect and tolerance for the views and values of different cultures and civilizations.

These are more than principles which Americans share. They are principles woven into the fabric of our national experience, and they are principles upon which we believe a wise and effective dialogue among civilizations can, in fact, be built.

Our ambitions for this dialogue should be great. In our globalized world, we should encourage, not hamper, the free flow of ideas. We should respect, not push aside, the values and beliefs of other cultures. We should cherish, not reject, the many manifestations of human diversity. The link between ignorance and violence cannot be ignored.

Culturally-based conflicts feed on prejudice, stereotypes, historical animosities and cynicism. So many tragedies have illuminated this fact for us. Now it is time for us to look into the fire yet again and bring the best qualities of our civilizations to bear on our problems, not the worst.

This dialogue among civilizations, in our opinion, is therefore an important and welcome initiative. We applaud and support it and look forward to its development in the months and years ahead.

Mr. Tuomiojia (Finland): At the outset, I would like to fully associate myself with the statement made by Mr. Louis Michel, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium, on behalf of the European Union, and I wish to make the following additional remarks.

Dialogue among civilizations is crucial for the enhancement of tolerance, mutual understanding and respect. Manifestations of intolerance arise from fear of the unknown, which at worst leads to conflicts and attacks against individuals. Open dialogue among individuals, peoples and cultures helps us to bring down barriers where they exist, or seem to exist.

For example, terrorist acts should not be linked to any particular religion or civilization. We know all too well from history that fanaticism, allied to any ideology or religion, can lead to blind hatred and violence. It is this kind of fanaticism and intolerance which is our common enemy.

As the Secretary-General has often emphasized, civilizations and cultures are not constant or immutable facts of history; they are always changing, growing, developing and adapting themselves to new times and new realities through interaction with each other. This interaction has created multi-ethnic and multicultural societies, rich and diverse in their heritage. Strict dichotomies between different cultures and civilizations are therefore unfounded, as is the oversimplified theory of a clash of civilizations.

A starting point in a dialogue among civilizations is the acknowledgement that the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world, as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Universal Declaration, together with the wide range of existing instruments adopted by the United Nations system concerning tolerance, human rights, cultural cooperation, science and education, constitutes a solid normative basis for the dialogue among civilizations.

Respect for human rights does not mean that differences between cultures would vanish. On the contrary, respect for diversity and the right to enjoy one's own culture are central elements of global ethics. The right of minorities and indigenous peoples to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion and to use their mother tongue has to be secured. We need systematic awareness-raising efforts regarding the history and the contributions of different minorities, indigenous peoples and other ethnic groups to the development of our contemporary societies. In this context, it is equally important that minorities themselves respect human rights, including those of women and girls.

It is our responsibility as Governments to ensure that dialogue is fully inclusive. Every individual, regardless of his or her status, must be able to participate in it. In this respect, I would particularly

like to emphasize the importance of the full and equal participation of women in all decision-making.

Freedom of speech and freedom of expression are necessary prerequisites for a true dialogue among civilizations. The media have an indispensable and instrumental role in the promotion of a dialogue. It is important that we ensure the independence of the media, so that they can effectively fulfil this task.

The Secretary-General has strongly advocated the culture of prevention. His report on the prevention of armed conflict was an important contribution to this end. One method of prevention is to increase knowledge and understanding within and between different cultures through an open dialogue. Training and education are essential in this respect, in particular human rights education. Education generates mutual respect, peaceful contacts and cooperation among people who belong to different religions, cultures or civilizations. I welcome the emphasis given to education in the global agenda for dialogue among civilizations.

The Durban World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance was a landmark in the context of global efforts to combat all forms of discrimination. We need to establish both multilateral and national mechanisms to implement the anti-discrimination agenda. As an example of a national-level mechanism to combat racial discrimination, I would like to mention that in Finland, the Office of Ombudsman for Minorities was established at the time of the Conference.

Finally, I would like to talk about children. Children are born without prejudices. The dialogue among civilizations should therefore begin with children. In her recent book, *The Impact of War on Children*, Ms. Graça Machel discusses a children's agenda for peace and security and emphasizes the importance of involving them as a resource. She noted that young people must not be seen as problems or victims, but, rather, as key contributors in the planning and implementation of long-term solutions. An excellent example of the contribution of children to peace and tolerance is the Children's Movement for Peace of Colombia.

The hideous acts of 11 September were a flagrant manifestation of blind hatred. We are determined to remain true and committed to our common aims, which by no coincidence are the very aims that terrorists attempt to undermine. The fight against terrorism is the fight for democracy. We have to stay united and vigorously promote the common values of humanity in order to prevent such attacks from taking place anywhere in the world in the future.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Didier Opertti Badan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay and former President of the General Assembly.

Mr. Opertti (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the fact that this year and at this particular time the General Assembly can take another step towards facilitating and promoting the dialogue among civilizations and that it is commemorating the year devoted to this issue, as well as the provision and adoption of the measures necessary for its progress.

Since the birth of the United Nations, our country, Uruguay, has been firmly committed to the guiding principles of the Charter that inspired its creation, and it fully shares the view that dialogue can and should always — I repeat — always prevail over discord, and that what unites the different peoples of the world in their human condition is much more — above all much more essential — than what separates them.

When in 1998 it was proposed that this item be taken up and considered by the General Assembly, I was presiding over this important body, and I had then the special privilege of giving it my most enthusiastic support. From the outset, it was clear that this initiative by the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran would open a new and promising door to channel a novel and valid form of cooperation among peoples and Governments that would go beyond economic cooperation, technical assistance and development assistance.

We share the view of Mr. Giandomenico Picco, the Secretary-General's Personal Representative, on this item, that while it has not been possible to achieve a satisfactory dialogue among civilizations thus far, far from representing an obstacle, this represents a greater challenge for those of us who believe that that is the line of action we should continue to take.

The various actions that have been taken allow us to maintain the hope that soon significant progress will be within the reach of all of us. We recall, among others actions, those taken by the Secretary-General, as contained in his report, document A/55/492/Rev.1; the

meeting of the heads of State of September 2000, held at Headquarters; the document entitled "Salzburg reflections", emanating from the meeting of August 2001; the conclusions of the Twenty-First Century Forum, a symposium that was held in Beijing, China, in September 2001; and the work being done by the Group of Eminent Persons selected by the Secretary-General, whom we heard this morning.

To this can be added today this high-level debate, whose outcome we hope will serve as guidelines for action to assist countries in the implementation of the world programme proposed in draft resolution A/56/L.3, which, of course, we support.

Today, more than ever, we must create and strengthen ties between peoples based on mutual knowledge, tolerance, understanding and the universal desire to promote peace and the rule of law. We will thus guarantee social, economic and political progress for all, regardless of differences, including those differences as an inherent part of reality.

In these times, in which the cruel experience of this country a few weeks ago has revealed to us how powerful the enemies of humanity are, how vulnerable our peoples are, how fragile our security is and what risks we are exposed to daily, the dialogue among civilizations is the only instrument that offers us extraordinary possibilities to contribute, through persuasion, to the prevention of conflicts, the suppression of rivalries and resentments and the strengthening of fraternity among nations.

Dialogue implies mutual respect. Dialogue necessarily leads to understanding and awareness, and from there, it brings the people of each civilization closer to the true essence of other civilizations. It clears up misunderstandings, eliminates prejudices — that great enemy of the human being, prejudice — and corrects errors. I therefore see in the dialogue among civilizations a genuinely useful and authentic tool, which the United Nations, as a forum that generously takes in the entire international community, should promote and develop to combat ignorance, intolerance, fundamentalist dogmatism of any kind and isolationism.

That is why the work being done by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to assess and reassess cultural diversity and to preserve the world's heritage is so important, as is the Declaration on Cultural Diversity, which it is elaborating and which we support.

Finally, our country, limited in geography but rich in history, which has always placed a high value on education, will continue its work in this field to contribute to the education of future generations of the world's civilizations, so that they can look each other in the eye without fear, hatred and preconceptions. The United Nations is the place, perhaps one of the best places, to galvanize and motivate that narrowing of differences, and in that we trust.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gabriel Orellana Rojas, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guatemala.

Mr. Orellana Rojas (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Since the General Assembly decided, in 1998, to proclaim the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, we have followed with keen interest the course of the debates on the subject at various seminars, conferences and roundtables. Our country has its roots in very ancient civilizations. We therefore understand the creative potential and also the risks of confrontation that cultural diversity brings. Our history, in fact, holds lessons derived from both possibilities. On the one hand, these lessons include the pain caused by a Western culture which imposes its values on an autochthonous one. On the other hand, they also embrace more recent initiatives, enshrined in the peace agreements concluded in December 1996, which establish juridical and political recognition to consolidate a multicultural, plurilingual and multiethnic State.

We realize that the very concept of a dialogue among civilizations can lead to misunderstandings. The idea of confrontation between cultures, ethnic groups or religions itself poses a risk of the first order to the values consecrated by the Charter, particularly as a result of the events that we have been living through since 11 September. This applies to the domestic policies of many of our countries and also relations among nations. What we have to seek today, more than ever before, is to extol diversity, venerate tolerance and promote dialogue, understanding and harmony. We must be guided by the need to emphasize the many things that unite us as human beings. For all these reasons, we applaud the felicitous initiative that has brought us together today.

This was the spirit that led us to subscribe, in March 1995, to the Agreement on the identity and rights of indigenous peoples. This Agreement recognizes the identity of the Maya, Garifuna and Xinca peoples, with a view to building national unity based on the respect for and exercise of the political, cultural, economic and spiritual rights of all Guatemalans. The Agreement seeks to combat de jure and de facto discrimination. It recognizes the particular vulnerability of indigenous women and creates an Office for the Defence of Indigenous Women's Rights. It als recognizes Mayan culture as the original basis of Guatemalan culture, and as an active and dynamic factor in the development and progress of society. The Agreement expressly recognizes that "educational and cultural policy must be oriented to focus on recognition, respect and encouragement of indigenous cultural values".

Finally, this agreement contains express commitments to civil, political, social and economic rights and establishes joint commissions, composed of representatives of the Government and of indigenous organizations, which are to follow up on the commitments assumed. Moreover, the peace agreements as a whole stress the value of respect for human rights, tolerance, participation, democracy and development, all of which are essential components of the subject of our debate.

This recent national experience also shapes our attitude on the international level. We thus thank the Secretary-General for the report issued under symbol A/56/523. We are also grateful to the countries that organized and contributed to the activities that this report describes. And we concur fully with the Secretary-General in that dialogue among civilizations is essential if we are to succeed in accomplishing one of the principal objectives of the United Nations, namely the prevention of conflicts. I would add to that idea the categorical imperative that development be pushed forward, since poverty and social inequality are the breeding ground for the tensions and confrontations that constitute the antithesis of what dialogue among civilizations seeks to achieve.

On an international level, the dialogue among civilizations has lost its territorial dimension. Advances in communication and, especially, unprecedented migration mean that dialogue among civilizations takes place every day between individual cultural agents, between neighbours in the same town or between colleagues. This leads to dialogue among multiple interlocutors, in which tolerance and understanding of differences becomes necessary because of the unexpected combinations of cultures and ideas. We must celebrate this manifold dialogue and the hybridization, interaction and metamorphosis that, in the long run, will destroy any fundamentalist and integrationist ideas of civilization.

We support the adoption of a programme of action that will sustain and give genuine content to the significant activities that have been undertaken pursuant to the mandates set out in General Assembly resolutions 53/22, 54/113 and 55/23, including the publication of the book *Crossing the Divide*. These activities concentrate and expand the principles and values enshrined in our Charter, and it is right to make of them an article of faith, and to recall them every day.

Mr. Jerandi (Tunisia) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to express on behalf of my delegation our thanks to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his report entitled "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations", and also his Personal Representative Mr. Picco and the Group of Eminent Persons for their efforts in preparing the document devoted to this issue. Although the idea of dialogue among civilizations is not new, the declaration of 2001 as the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations had a unmistakable effect on the international community.

We are today more resolved than ever to give dialogue among civilizations its due place, especially in the new world context created by the terrorist acts that were unleashed against the United States on 11 September. These events have shown that such dialogue is absolutely essential and urgent. But it cannot be conceived solely as a counter-attack against terrorism; it should be seen as a way of bringing peoples together and spreading peace.

In this respect, the President of the Republic of Tunisia, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, urged the leaders of the world, the forces of good and men who are wise and shape opinion to intensify their efforts to prevent public opinion or relations between peoples from sliding, as a result of a conjuction of events, towards the re-emergence of the spectre of confrontation between religions, which are in essence, and through the nobility of their goals, sources of tolerance, dialogue and solidarity.

Our President also declared:

> "The future of security, stability and development in the world depends on whether we can enshrine principles of mutual understanding and tolerance between peoples. We are determined, for our part, to spare no effort that might contribute to furthering this goal."

Tunisia — a crossroads, a meeting place for many civilizations, with a rich, 3,000-year-long history — has always worked to bring peoples together and to reinforce the links between different civilizations. Modern Tunisia will continue to defend this ideal and to work to promote tolerance, diversity, dialogue and harmony. On the basis of this conviction, the President of the Republic just announced, on 7 November 2001, that a university chair for dialogue among civilizations and religions was being set up.

Since very soon we will be host to an international symposium on the dialogue among civilizations, organized jointly with the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Tunisia will do all it can to ensure that this meeting is an important stage in humankind's steady search for ways to enshrine these noble principles and to protect them against all potential dangers.

We are convinced that the dialogue among civilizations should be open to all and be based upon the principles set out in the United Nations Charter. The dialogue among civilizations starts by recognizing the equality of all civilizations and their successive contributions to humanity, with no pretensions to superiority. We also consider that dialogue presupposes that all civilizations are of equal importance, that none of them can claim to be supreme, and that because of this, the dialogue among civilizations must necessarily mean that we reject exclusion and interference; it means greater understanding, tolerance and respect for others.

We consider that the essence of the dialogue among civilizations is to advocate cultural and religious diversity, which is a source of vitality and not a cause of division and confrontation. The dialogue will be possible only if we accept the fact that the international community as a whole shares the common values of tolerance and liberty and expresses the unshakable wish to live in a world where human rights are universally respected.

With the end of bipolar division, our world is now faced with the phenomenon of globalization, which seems more and more to be governing international relations and showing how deep and complex human diversity is in every way. We must make sure that this phenomenon of globalization provides equal opportunities for all, without imposing on one group or another any particular cultural or economic system. Maintaining and promoting identities and protecting cultural and civilizational traditions should not threaten peace and security and serve as a pretext for exclusion or ultra-nationalism. On the contrary, interaction among cultures, a result of globalization, should preserve the diversity and richness of different civilizations.

Our duty is to do everything we can to make the world a better place, and to this end the international community must shoulder its responsibilities, put right the wrongs and find just, equitable and lasting solutions to the conflicts that have been going on for so long. We hope that the year 2001, the international Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, will offer a specific and viable solution for the Palestinian question, because the Palestinian people continue to suffer humiliation and flagrant violations of their fundamental rights, and day after day the denial of their inalienable right to a State on their own territory with Al-Quds as the capital.

It is equally important that, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the United Nations should deal equally with all causes, without distinction. We continue to believe firmly that this is the best place for dialogue to take place, based on the principles of equality, justice, tolerance and respect for international law.

Mr. Simão (Mozambique): Mr. President, I wish to join previous speakers in congratulating you upon your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session. I am sure that under your able guidance our deliberations will be crowned with success. I also wish to congratulate your predecessor, Mr. Harri Holkeri, for his outstanding work during the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly.

I would like to seize this opportunity to reiterate our profound sympathy and solidarity with the people and the Government of the United States of America for the tragic events of 11 September. We also share the

pain and sorrow of those nations and all the bereaved families who lost citizens on that tragic day.

Allow me also to reiterate my Government's unequivocal condemnation of international terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Terrorism is, indeed, a great threat to international peace and security that requires strong and concerted commitment and action of all nations of the world. It is vital that the United Nations remain central to international efforts to combat terrorism and every threat to international peace and security. These efforts must be directed at both suppressing and preventing these threats, including the threat of international terrorism. As reaffirmed in the Millennium Declaration,

> "the United Nations is the indispensable common house of the entire human family, through which we will seek to realize our universal aspirations for peace, cooperation and development".

At this juncture, I wish to pay tribute to Secretary-General Kofi Annan upon his being awarded the 2001 Nobel Peace Prize. Awarding this prize to Kofi Annan and the United Nations is a clear demonstration of the recognition of the role that the world body and its Secretary-General have played as guarantor of international peace and security.

Once again, Mozambique salutes His Excellency President Khatami of Iran for his initiative of proposing to this world body the discussion of such a transcendent subject. The dialogue among civilizations is of fundamental importance to the future of humanity. Dialogue among civilizations is of fundamental importance to the future of humanity. Dialogue among civiliations is an essential element in promoting peace and tolerance throughout the world. This dialogue must seek to permanently promote inclusion, equity, equality and tolerance in human interaction.

Our heads of State and Government affirmed last year at the Millennium Summit that tolerance is one of the fundamental values essential to international relations in the twenty-first century. They also affirmed the need to actively promote a culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations, with human beings respecting one another in all their diversity of belief, culture and language, neither fearing nor repressing differences within and between societies, but cherishing them as a precious asset of humanity.

It is in the same spirit that my delegation believes that a meaningful search for lasting peace and prosperity in the world, a task we are committed to, must be based on a permanent dialogue both within and among nations, civilizations and groups. An effective promotion of a culture of peace and tolerance should also be reflected at both the individual and national levels within our own States. In this regard, politicians, religious and community leaders, the media and civil society in general must take the lead.

It is essential that every individual, regardless of his or her culture and values, make an effort to appreciate and respect the culture and values of other human beings. Minorities and communities within our societies should be encouraged to participate in every social activity that seeks to foster the sense of common belonging and should feel free to bring along their individual culture and values as an important contribution to building a harmonious and tolerant society. Only such a dialogue, based on respect for human dignity and the philosophical, religious, political and cultural diversity that characterize our world, will indeed lead us to an enhanced mutual understanding and respect among civilizations.

Mr. Sevilla Somoza (Nicaragua), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Our reality today makes this need increasingly urgent. Globalization is not only about political, economic and technology interactions among nations; it is also about an enhanced interaction among peoples of more diverse cultures, races and ethnicities than ever witnessed before. In order to meet the challenges posed by these realities, we must endeavour to promote peace, stability and development in the world. The most solid common ground towards the realization of that end is undoubtedly a continuous and open dialogue based on acceptance of our cultural diversity and the right to be differen Our cultural and social differences should therefore be seen not as elements of disunity, but as sources of strength and desire for a common future and a better future for all.

What is meant by a culture of peace and tolerance? In the segment on a dialogue among civilizations in the course of the Millennium Summit, President Chissano sought to provide an answer based on our own experience by defining a culture of peace and tolerance as

"a set of values, attitudes and behaviours, ways of living and acting, based on respect for life, the dignity and rights of the human person, rejection of violence, including all forms of terrorism, and commitment to the principles of freedom, justice, solidarity, tolerance and understanding among all people, all groups in society and among individuals".

It is in this spirit that Mozambique has actively participated in several initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue within the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Organization of African Unity and the Southern African Development Community, as well as other organizations and national initiatives, as a sign of its strong commitment to searching for lasting solutions to conflicts in the world.

The efforts to promote understanding among civilizations, stability and prosperity in the world will not prevail unless the root causes of conflicts that continue to devastate many parts of the world, in particular Africa, are seriously addressed.

Mozambique strongly believes that poverty inevitably leads to aggravated conflicts. Poverty, as revealed in many parts of the world, breads intolerance as it leads to the perception that some sectors of society are more advantaged than others, which are left with no hope. We believe that peace and tolerance will remain unattainable for as long as the majority of our populations go stomach-empty. Therefore, the fight against poverty, particularly absolute poverty, is an essential element of fruitful dialogue among different civilizations and social groups.

It is on this understanding that the Government's social and economic development programme gives the highest priority to poverty alleviation. The Programme of Action on Absolute Poverty Reduction, which was recently adopted for the period 2001-2005, regards education, heath and rural development as key to poverty reduction. By adopting this Programme, we seek to make Mozambique a better place to live.

We believe that the proclamation by the General Assembly of the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations brings additional impetus to the promotion of the concept of dialogue among civilizations as a cornerstone of facing the challenges of building and maintaining enduring peace in the world. This impetus comes in addition to many other initiatives, such as the proclamation by the General Assembly of the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace and the proclamation of the period 2001-2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World.

These initiatives create an opportunity to mobilize all international and national actors to work together to assert a culture of non-violence based on the concepts of the culture of peace, tolerance and dialogue. It is our hope that these concepts will develop and acquire deserved recognition in international relations so that the culture of reaction is gradually replaced by a culture of prevention.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): As the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations draws to a close, there is need to take stock of where we stand and where we go from here in further promoting this concept and its practice. The Secretary-General's report on the observance of the Year, contained in document A/56/523, is useful to us in making such an assessment and in deciding on a future course of action. We thank him and his personal representative, Mr. Giandomenico Picco, for the report and for their prodigious efforts.

Allow me to express through you, Sir, our profound and sincere gratitude to President Mohammad Khatami for his most inspiring remarks this morning focused on the subject. We are beholden to his country, the Islamic Republic of Iran, for the enormous contribution it has made towards advancing the ideal embodied in the concept. Iran itself is the cradle of an ancient civilization, contacts with which have perennially enriched the world.

We should also like to thank the Group of Eminent Persons for its work, which enhances our understanding of the many dimensions of such dialogue.

We live in turbulent times. The rapid pace of globalization is bringing peoples, societies and cultures into close interaction. Information is shared at the speed of light. Money, goods and, to a lesser extent, human beings have unprecedented mobility. Values and ideas permeate global divides with facility. Civilizations are drawn closer to one another as they have never been before.

We are aware though, that proximity has not always advanced understanding or a sharing of values. Consciousness of distinctions and recognition of differences have also bred rejection. This process of rejection has the sad potential to cause humanity to turn its back on centuries of accomplishment. Such rejection could give rise to exclusion, intolerance and even, at times, hatred. Ideas, values and practices of others can be dismissed as strange. This could, as we well know, lead to horrendous consequences.

In a post-11 September world, we have to convert the monologue of dominance into a dialogue of accommodation. For that, we need to recognize once again the values of dialogue among civilizations. In paragraph 20 of his report (A/56/523), the Secretary-General pointed out that such dialogue "may be a soft tool of diplomacy but, in the long term, it can prevail". Those are, indeed, wise words.

Dialogue among civilizations has to be vigorously pursued across all divides in its broadest manifestation. Obviously, the United Nations is the right forum for this purpose. The Secretary-General has highlighted how the dialogue is critical to promoting the two main objectives of the Organization: conflict prevention and resolution, and economic and social development.

We must maintain the momentum generated by the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. We are encouraged by the many initiatives organized by a host of actors during the Year. We are heartened by the burgeoning sense of optimism it has already created. We now look to the beginning of real dialogue and more concrete achievements.

To take the work forward, the General Assembly has before it for consideration a draft global agenda. We are a co-sponsor of the draft resolution in document A/56/L.3, which contains that draft agenda. It not only recounts the objectives of the dialogue, which we aspire to realize, but also lays down a clear course of action for its diligent pursuit. We commend its adoption to all.

Its adoption should not — must not — be an end in itself. The idea is that it should create an enabling framework to institutionalize the dialogue. States, international and regional organizations and civil society will need to work in partnership and cooperation to that end. Let me stress here that the involvement of all strata of society in the dialogue, including women, children and vulnerable groups, will be critical to its success. Overcoming exclusion and discrimination and promoting tolerance and understanding require the blessings of all.

Bangladesh will continue to support this noble goal in every possible way. As a pluralist society, we are fully persuaded that a critical ingredient of democracy is the tolerance of distinctiveness. In order to create a peaceful and harmonious world, differences must be not only acknowledged and tolerated, but also celebrated. For beauty in the garden of God lies in variety.

Mr. Valdivieso (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Colombia would like to thank the Islamic Republic of Iran for having promoted the initiative of the international Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for having prepared a report on this issue; his Personal Representative, Mr. Giandomenico Picco; and the Group of Eminent Persons. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also deserves credit for its worthy efforts to promote and strengthen the idea of dialogue among civilizations, and for its contributions in that area.

Throughout the 50 years of its existence, the United Nations has shown us that, in the absence of a daily dialogue among nations of various civilizations, peace is ephemeral. It has been demonstrated that on the basis of respect, understanding and mutual tolerance among States and different cultures, a world can be built in which dignity, human rights, solidarity, hope and peace prevail.

We support the Secretary-General's statement:

> "The United Nations itself was created in the belief that dialogue can triumph over discord, that diversity is a universal virtue, and that the peoples of the world are far more united by common fate than they are divided by their separate identities."

We do not doubt that the new threats to international peace and security will require that the United Nations system and its key role in the search for open and universal dialogue be further strengthened.

Our Organization is the obvious forum in which to hold a constructive, open, respectful and productive dialogue among various nations and cultures — a

dialogue based on tolerance, mutual understanding and respect for diversity; one that cultivates the intellect, encouraging an understanding of the various cultures and civilizations and consolidating friendship among our peoples. Such a dialogue will strengthen universal cooperation, solidarity and peace, rooted in respect for the principle of the equality of rights and self-determination of peoples.

Current circumstances require us to undertake a dialogue based on shared values, such as respect for life, defence of human dignity, equality among all and protection of the environment. Such a dialogue would be a tool of transformation, an example of peace and tolerance and a celebration of diversity and cultural and religious pluralism, which are among humanity's greatest riches.

This challenge is even more important in the context of globalization, which, more than ever before, has emphasized interdependence among all the nations of the world. Such interdependence will make it possible for us to better understand the common destiny of humanity and to strengthen an authentic culture of solidarity. In order for dialogue to be effective, we must preserve cultural diversity while ensuring the more equitable distribution of the benefits and costs of globalization, in the interests of developing countries in particular.

The Year of Dialogue among Civilizations provides us with an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate diversity and to seek a new system of relations based on inclusion. The aim is to foster a universal dialogue with the active participation of Governments, whose job it is to encourage and promote such a dialogue; international and regional organizations, which must adopt measures and organize events so as to facilitate it; and the United Nations, which must continue to promote and strengthen a culture of dialogue among civilizations as the foundation of its own activities.

This high-level debate on the scope and aim of the dialogue among civilizations must result in a firm commitment on the part of all States Members of the United Nations. There must be an exchange of views and we must make room for analysis and investigation that will make it possible to devise forms of dialogue and concerted action. We must therefore join in the important efforts being undertaken by UNESCO, within the context of its medium-term strategy, to encourage academic institutions, non-governmental organizations and international institutions to become involved.

The scheduling of conferences, workshops and seminars, with the participation of civil society, Governments, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, will be a valuable contribution to achieving this end. My delegation acknowledges the importance of some of the initiatives that have been taken in recent months to promote dialogue among civilizations, including the International Conference in Tokyo and Kyoto; the Salzburg dialogue among civilizations; the Tehran Declaration; the Twenty-First Century Forum in Beijing; and the Vilnius Conference.

As a co-sponsor of the draft resolution entitled "Global agenda for dialogue among civilizations", Colombia trusts that it will be adopted, as it is of decisive importance for the process of building a universal culture based on dialogue and respect for diversity.

To us belongs the enormous responsibility of planting the seeds of dialogue so that we may later reap the harvest of peace, development, well-being and respect for human rights. We should take up the challenge of managing public affairs on the basis of inclusion, not exclusion. As Secretary-General Kofi Annan has stated categorically, peace begins in the minds of those who perceive diversity as a factor in improvement and growth. We must once and for all overcome a past of discord, intolerance and rejection of diversity in order to make progress together in this new century towards a universal culture in which harmony among nations, respect for our differences and solidarity prevail.

Mr. Duval (Canada) (*spoke in French*): In 1993, on the occasion of the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, all Member States of the United Nations reaffirmed their commitment to the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and reaffirmed that human rights are universal, interdependent, interrelated and indivisible. This shared view is the basis for our dialogue today.

Canada congratulates President Khatami of Iran and the Secretary-General's Personal Representative, Mr. Giandomenico Picco, on their efforts to engage Governments, international organizations and civil society in a dialogue that seeks to promote and protect

respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and welcomes diversity. The free exchange of ideas between all members of society will further our understanding of each others' cultures and will encourage us to recognize that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms lies at the foundation of all cultures.

Tolerance, respect for diversity and adapting to and accommodating change are fundamental to peaceful and prosperous coexistence and to the development and stability of societies and peoples. Indeed, they are part of the foundation of physical safety and security. The dramatic events of 11 September have shown us how that safety and security can be challenged. In the face of such global challenges, our efforts to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, dialogue and exchange should not falter.

New communications technologies, human migration, increased travel, trade liberalization and increasing interest in other cultures have increased intercultural and interpersonal contacts, giving rise to a richness of diversity as well as the challenge of managing such diversity. For Canada, embracing diversity within a framework of democratic values and respect for human rights is the wellspring of both the economic and the social vitality of our society. As a bilingual and multicultural society, Canada views the diversity of its society as a fundamental characteristic of its identity and as one of its greatest and most precious assets. Canadians have understood that respecting identity and accepting, promoting and preserving diversity make it possible to build bridges among peoples, communities and nations.

We encourage, and will participate in, similar actions at the international level in the hope of encouraging greater understanding between people. For example, Canada has strongly supported the initiative of the United Nations Scientific, Educational and Cultural Organizations that recently resulted in the unanimous approval of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity.

(*spoke in English*)

Canada is also careful to ensure that measures to foster respect for cultural diversity are not barriers to full participation by all in civil, economic, cultural, social and political life, or to the enjoyment of human security. Otherwise, they defeat their own purpose.

For dialogue to successfully contribute to understanding between people of different backgrounds and cultures it must include a broad range of participants. A successful dialogue is dependent upon the full and effective participation of women and girls. Their experiences and perspectives are an essential part of any meaningful dialogue. At the Beijing+5 special session of the General Assembly, in June 2000, Member States reaffirmed their commitment to promoting the full participation and empowerment of women. In Canada we have also looked to the vitality and creativity of children and youth in promoting cross-cultural understanding apd tolerance. The contribution of Canada's aboriginal peoples to the foundations of our country is of essential importance.

To be meaningful, dialogue must also be undertaken in a free and open climate. True dialogue is possible only when the freedoms of expression and association and the freedoms of thought, conscience and belief are respected. To be sustainable and meaningful, dialogue must look to developing effective tools for promoting and protecting human rights. We need to create tools to ensure that diversity is a means of improving security and participation, a means of strengthening cultural expression and creating prosperity and realizing that all nations benefit from the opportunities afforded by the global environment.

Education is a key tool in the fight to eradicate racism and other forms of discrimination and intolerance. Recognizing that educational systems build attitudes and shape behaviours, we must ensure that our schools incorporate the contributions of individuals of diverse backgrounds in teaching activities and in the curriculum. Steps should be taken to ensure that we do not reinforce negative stereotypes or promote intolerance among our youth.

Yet another key tool is the development of public awareness initiatives to promote respect for diversity at the national, regional and international levels. We wholeheartedly agree with the Secretary-General when he says that cultural and religious diversity is a source of strength, and that dialogue is possible if we accept that we live in a diverse world and share the same values of tolerance, freedom and respect for universal human rights. We the peoples of the United Nations must recommit ourselves to open and meaningful dialogue to ensure tolerance and respect for diversity. We need to realize our shared values of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We are committed to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and to their universal application. These are commitments that we as States have made to each other, and we have also made them to our citizens in order to achieve a safe, peaceful world rich in diversity and respect.

Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein): Some commentators have interpreted the events of 11 September and the developments thereafter as a clash of civilizations. Those who had pronounced inevitable the advent of such a clash seemed almost pleased to see their "vision" come true. We believe that they are wrong. Terrorism is neither an expression of, nor for that matter confined to, any particular civilization. Rather, it is a scourge that exists world-wide and indeed constitutes the denial and destruction of all civilizations.

Advocating the idea of a clash of civilizations as a way of understanding the worst terrorist attacks in the history of humanity is dangerous. However, it would be equally dangerous to deny the fact that the risk of such a clash exists more than ever after 11 September. Unless we are able to join forces in the spirit of mutual understanding and respect, we might indeed be headed for such a clash. This is how the United Nations is challenged today and is why the initiative launched by President Khatami offers such an important opportunity.

The United Nations — "We the peoples", as the Charter puts it so aptly — is certainly the natural forum in which to conduct such a dialogue, an essential part of our answer not only to terrorism, but also to intolerance, racism and social exclusion. The International Year of Dialogue among Civilizations is coming to an end shortly, but it was of course meant to galvanize an ongoing process to whose success we all have a unique opportunity to contribute. Our first contribution must be the creation of the prerequisites for such a dialogue.

There can be dialogue within and among civilizations only if people are given a voice. The dialogue must be fully inclusive and participatory; it is to be held not among Governments, but among people. As Governments, we are obliged to create the conditions under which a dialogue can take place. Freedom of expression and the forums and means through which to conduct such a dialogue are prerequisites for holding it. Access to information, the media and information technology are crucial as well. The recent developments in information and communications technology provide us with unprecedented opportunities to engage with other people all around the world — but, of course, only those of us who have access to these technologies. Bridging the digital divide must thus form part of our efforts to launch a dialogue. Moreover, giving a voice to those who have something to say is possible only if they have been given education, the most basic and often still unmet prerequisite for an ongoing and sustained dialogue. Finally, the United Nations and all of us are challenged to be role models, to live the concept of dialogue among civilizations and nations. We have a tendency to take for granted the opportunity to conduct such a dialogue on a daily basis, while in fact it is an immense privilege. We must wonder if we always make optimal use of it.

The dialogue we seek to establish requires not merely the willingness to do so but also very concrete action in the areas I have just mentioned. Carrying out a genuine dialogue, based on both speaking and listening, on giving and taking, requires more: curiosity, openness, a willingness to learn and to share. We agree with those who say that diversity is an opportunity, not a threat. But we all know that it is often perceived as a threat. Diversity poses a challenge in that it forces us to look at ourselves. Realizing that things can be done differently from the way we are accustomed to doing them may make us question our own ways. This presents a great opportunity, but it can also create unease, because it disturbs the comfort level inherent in the preservation of the state of affairs and in inertia. We must therefore develop and spread the understanding that diversity is an expression of neither inferiority nor superiority. If such an understanding were to be the only result of the process of the dialogue among civilizations, we would consider that a great achievement in itself.

A civilization is not static, not a final product of a historical process. Quite to the contrary, a civilization needs to constantly evolve, adapt and change. These are the very actions that ensure its long-term development and survival. If we look at the civilization of which we are a part — Western civilization — it is quite obvious that its constituent elements are not identical to those of a few centuries ago.

In the era of globalization, this fact becomes particularly significant. The process of global intercultural exchange takes place largely unimpeded and, most important, at unprecedented speed. There is understandable concern that globalization may lead not only to a further and deepened division between the haves and the have-nots, but also to the predominance of one civilization over the others. Globalization will work only if it works for everybody. A dialogue among civilizations must contribute to shaping the forces of globalization in a culturally sound and sustainable manner that preserves the richness of diversity.

The United Nations has been given a natural role of leadership in this process. However, dialogue also can and must be promoted by other bodies. We draw the Assembly's attention in particular to the work of the Council of Europe, whose Committee of Ministers Liechtenstein had the honour to chair until a few days ago. At its most recent session, the Ministers expressed their determination to promote a wide intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, in particular to face the manifold threats posed by terrorism. This determination is part of its wider commitment to develop strong democracies based on diversity and social justice. Through its long-standing and intensive experience in the area of cultural exchange, the Council of Europe is perfectly placed to make a significant contribution to the dialogue among civilizations, and we commend its work to the attention of the Assembly.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to express our gratitude to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his report, containing, as it does, valuable information that is bound to reinforce our debate within the framework of this item.

I should also like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the great efforts of Mr. Giandomenico Picco, Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, and the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

The year 2001 is the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, and the heads of State and Government at last year's Millennium Assembly agreed to a number of obligations to develop a culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations, and to make all possible efforts to settle disagreements and overcome conflicts and obstacles that divide nations and peoples. In view of this, we were surprised to find the enemies of this dialogue rushing to abort the idea of this constructive human gathering by escalating organized terrorism against innocent people. Such terrorism was embodied in the attacks of 11 September. It is also embodied in State terrorism based on occupation, racial discrimination and religious and ethnic extremism, which will only lead to ruin and destruction, such as that witnessed daily by the Palestinian people in territories occupied by Israel.

The repercussions of these kinds of terrorism, in addition to the continued presence of hotbeds of clashes, armed conflicts, occupation, acts of violence, the arms race among States, the emergence of serious human rights violations and the spread of the scourges of transboundary organized crime, drugs and prohibited arms have given the subject of the dialogue among civilizations an urgent importance. It is one of the best means, along with the political and diplomatic efforts and other frameworks of international cooperation, for spreading the humanitarian principles of forgiveness, solidarity and cooperation, which oppose all forms of extremism, discrimination and hatred and usually constitute the main source feeding the dangerous repercussions in all these challenges.

We also affirm that terrorist acts, ethnic cleansing practices and other grave violations of human rights experienced in many areas of the world during the last couple of years have proved that their perpetrators do not belong to one particular nationality, religion or race, but rather have different origins and different political, religious and ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, we are greatly concerned about the continued prejudiced campaigns of discrimination, hatred and distortion that many Zionist and Western media and other organizations engage in to link the Arabs and Muslims to terrorism, specifically at a time when these campaigns constitute a main source for building up hatred and discrimination among peoples and confrontations among civilizations. Accordingly, we strongly call on the Western States, as part of this dialogue and as a first step, to re-examine their prejudiced policies with regard to the issues and conflicts of Arab and Muslim States and to adopt measures necessary for confronting all the hostile, provocative and discriminatory practices committed daily against the peoples of these States.

The benefits of the opportunities for social and economic links provided by globalization, modern communications technology and the Internet during the last decade have contributed, regrettably, to producing the so-called "generalized" culture among younger generations and college graduates, who have come to prefer being associated with the tools and languages of the developed States, which refrain from showing the cultural diversity of other peoples and civilizations, specifically those of the developing countries. Accordingly, we believe in the importance of continued interaction between the local and international spheres. At the same time, we affirm the importance of ensuring that the ideologies of the developed States do not control the tools of modern globalization. These tools should be enriched with the diversity and unique multiculturalism of different peoples regardless of their origins and backgrounds. We also consider that any dialogue among civilizations within this framework should be based on the foundations of respect for human dignity, the principles of justice, transparency and equality among peoples — away from the discrimination and double standards that many powerful States continue to practise in regard to the issues and interests of the developing States and their peoples.

Dealing with the subject of the dialogue among civilizations leads us towards studying and understanding the historical bases and the components of the heritage, culture and science that shaped these civilizations. Furthermore, it is well known that the Arab homeland area, to which the Emirates belongs, was a cradle of ancient civilizations and religions. The last of these was Islam, which spread as a religion, philosophy and tolerant ideology not only for the peoples there but also for many areas of the world.

The United Arab Emirates is committed to passing various laws and educational programmes that strengthen human and ethical values and the principles of respecting other peoples' traditions and beliefs, based on the original Arabic traditions that are derived from the principles of the Holy Koran and Islamic culture that call for forgiveness, equality, solidarity and respect for the cultural diversity between peoples. The United Arab Emirates has also ensured the freedom of the foreign minorities residing in the country to practise their religious rituals and cultural and social activities. It has encouraged, all year-round, the holding of cultural forums and symposiums and the attraction of intellectuals, journalists, exhibits and folkloric music bands to enrich the knowledge and openness of the Emirates society towards the diverse concepts and ideas of other civilizations, while taking into consideration its adherence to its unique heritage, ancestors and environment.

On the international level, the United Arab Emirates has been active in concluding many agreements, memorandums of understanding and cultural, informational and educational exchanges on the bilateral, regional and international levels, in addition to participating in conferences and intellectual, artistic and philosophical forums around the world. This has led to its enrichment and interaction and cooperation with the civilizations and concepts of other peoples.

In conclusion, we support the suggestions to enhance the programmes and mechanisms of a comprehensive dialogue that is based on the concepts of understanding and realizing the problems, concerns and aims of other peoples without denying their national rights, enslaving them or interfering in their internal affairs. We hope our efforts, within the framework of this item, will constitute a positive step towards strengthening the example of the dialogue among civilizations as a new approach and tool in the nature of international relations. Such a tool will contribute to the eradication of division and to the enrichment of diversity, understanding and convergence of opinions, as well as supporting understanding, cooperation and openness among States and peoples to inspire the joint efforts reinforcing sustainable development and enhancing peace and security and spreading harmony and peaceful coexistence free from all kinds of fear, injustice, deprivation, violence, hatred, poverty and the dangerous repercussions of destructive wars.

Mr. Shrestha (Nepal): It is a matter of supreme pleasure to have this opportunity to express my view before this Assembly of representatives of Member States of the United Nations. While thanking the President for the opportunity granted to me to make this statement, I also wish to express my sincere appreciation for the Secretary-General's report on the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. It is heartening to know that in pursuit of General Assembly resolution 53/22 of 4 November 1998 to proclaim 2001 the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, several action programmes have

been successfully conducted with the active support and cooperation of Governments and relevant non-governmental organizations at the initiative of the General Assembly.

Nothing could be more important than bringing the representatives of different Governments, divergent groups and differing faiths to a common forum to discuss the issue that concerns mankind so that the disruptive forces with a high propensity to threaten the prospects of peace in society and the world at large would be mitigated.

The appropriateness of having chosen the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations cannot be exaggerated at this juncture, at a time when the world, overcast by the dark shadows of tensions that are threatening to erupt, is in desperate need of a road map towards peace.

As a nation committed to the principles of democracy and human rights, Nepal is always happy to see the United Nations working to uphold the cause of mankind. Perceived as the last hope of humanity, the United Nations has often demonstrated its efficacy in preventing the world from being caught up in the whirlwind of confrontation.

The catastrophic terrorist attacks against the United States on 11 September have once again made the United Nations the focus of attention and a source of confidence for people. The deaths of thousands of innocent human beings from many countries, not to mention the financial losses that have adversely affected the global economy, have pierced and pricked the conscience of the civilized world. Nepal, which has complete faith in the United Nations Charter, promptly decided to side with all decisions taken by this world body to fight the threat of terrorism on a global scale.

A sustained, continuous and coordinated international effort must be made until the threat of terrorism is eradicated, whatever its origin. Terrorism is the antithesis of peace, which is the most cherished commodity in today's world. The call for peace is universal, but, sadly, all are not equally prepared to work to create an atmosphere in which peace reigns supreme and makes prosperity for mankind possible. This lacuna has to be addressed through the use of the weapon of dialogue by all civilized nations and communities. Nothing is more precious than the chance to have a meeting of minds that are looking to create a better world in which to live.

The series of conferences that have been held in various parts of the world — under the sponsorship of the United Nations and with the active cooperation of one of its key agencies, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) — which have been attended by a number of countries, have done a laudable job of bringing different civilizations together to thrash out ideas on a common goal for the good of mankind. Such commendable activities should be made as inclusive and comprehensive as possible, so as to accommodate all of the major civilizations of the world. In keeping with the spirit of the United Nations, all such efforts should be geared towards embracing all of mankind, which is living under diverse civilizational conditions.

May I submit that the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, promulgated in 1991, is a by-product of dialogue among the major political forces of the country. It is a creation of national consensus. It has provided a vast umbrella under which people of different races, castes, creeds and ethnicities can live in harmony and mutual respect. Dialogue is the device of democracy which is used to banish delusions, doubts and distortions from the human mind. But, regrettably, the democratic polity of Nepal has, over the last 70 months, witnessed some acts of insurgency. The insurgents, who prefer to be branded as Maoists, tend, though they are concentrated in certain far-flung mountainous areas of the country, to stage a display of their ascendancy wherever or whenever possible.

Their acts of violence, though scattered and sporadic, have resulted in the deaths of more than 1,700 people, including police personnel, rebels and innocent civilians. To avoid any further loss of life and also to accelerate the pace of development — which the people desperately need — the Government of the Kingdom of Nepal, instead of resorting, in the first instance, to the use of force, has asked for dialogue in order to devise a mutually acceptable formula for good governance of the country that would not jeopardize the fundamentals of the Constitution. Rounds of talks between the representatives of the Government and the insurgent Maoists are still going on.

We are fully convinced that terrorism in any form cannot be justified, whatever its circumstances. It deserves outright condemnation and censure. However, we feel that terrorists can easily profit from the frustrations of people who are destined to live under conditions of social and economic deprivation. We

need a restructured socio-economic order that promises to put human civilization in the proper perspective. To achieve this goal, a Government must serve as a catalyst, guardian, facilitator or regulator, depending upon the circumstances prevailing in a given society.

Aware of this fact, the Government of Nepal has recently taken drastic socio-economic measures to place our socially and economically backward communities at centre stage in order speedily to improve their quality of life. The process of dialogue can always be facilitated through the creation of an environment in which social, economic and political justice is visibly available.

All of the major religions and faiths, placed in their proper perspective, have as a common goal the promotion of the cause of mankind in a selfless spirit of service to others. It is the occasional distortions, obduracy and intransigence on the part of self-proclaimed heirs to the prophets, preachers, seers and saints which have given rise to hatred and conflict and to clashes among the adherents of different religions.

Confrontation leads to greater confrontation. What is needed is a process of dialogue, which opens the door for people to understand others' viewpoints and also to make others understand one's own viewpoints. After all, civilization is but an assimilation of the collective efforts of human beings to achieve a better life.

Mr. Kára (Czech Republic): While we may continue to clarify the notion of dialogue among civilizations, and while we may choose to speak of only one civilization embracing all the astonishing diversity of humankind, there is little doubt about substance and relevance of our current discussion. Indeed, dialogue between representatives of various cultures, ethnic groups, religions or societal models in our globalized, interconnected and interdependent world seems to take on greater importance with every new challenge we face.

My delegation therefore wishes to express its deep appreciation to the Islamic Republic of Iran and to all of those who helped to start this process, as well as to the Secretary-General and his Personal Representative, Mr. Giandomenico Picco, for their invaluable contributions, which have resulted in, among other things, the enlightening book *Crossing the Divide: Dialogue among Civilizations*, which was recently published. Our special thanks also go to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

A number of speakers over the last two days have contrasted dialogue and terrorism, pointing out that the dividing lines are not between cultures and religions, but between the "civilized" and the "barbaric". My delegation fully endorses such a view. We are also, with others, convinced of the power of dialogue, through emphasizing common values, to help prevent the conflicts and problems of this world.

Since the Czech Republic aligned itself with the statement made this morning on behalf of the European Union by the representative of Belgium, let me confine myself to just a few remarks concerning my country's specific input into the dialogue. I refer to the series of Forum 2000 conferences, which has been organized every year since 1997 in Prague under the auspices of Mr. Václav Havel, the President of the Czech Republic. It brings together eminent personalities with different cultural, religious or ethnic backgrounds with the aim of exchanging views, sharing values and looking for both visionary and practical solutions to problems of the contemporary world. The outcome of the last of these conferences, the Prague Declaration of 17 October 2001, has been made available to all delegations in document A/56/498. I am sure that a number of areas and activities covered by the Declaration and the Forum 2000 process are in perfect harmony with respective elements of the proposed Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations and its Programme of Action. We therefore fully support and co-sponsor the respective draft resolution we are about to adopt.

It is very encouraging to see the growing list of activities within the framework of today's agenda item at global, regional, national and local levels. Let us all hope that the Global Agenda will lay down a solid foundation for continuing and enhancing the dialogue.

Ms. Alhashimi (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today the General Assembly is discussing a topic that may provide a glimmer of hope in the midst of a world experiencing a state of indescribable terror caused by wars, bombs, smart missiles, the lacerated corpses of children and the images of displaced women, elderly and children who have managed to escape launched rockets. Cold, starvation and death await them at every moment in a world where most people are chafing under the yoke of war, marginalization, backwardness,

sanctions, poverty and inequality. Therefore, while discussing the dialogue among civilizations seems to contradict today's reality, it nonetheless constitutes fertile ground for philanthropic attempts to spare the human race the spectre of pain and suffering, curb the dangers of hegemony, domination and control of the destinies of the world's peoples and the imposition of specific life patterns on them.

Iraq's firm belief in cultural diversity and in the inevitability of dialogue among civilizations is a natural extension of our ancient civilizational heritage, whose roots reach back more than 5,000 years. That heritage is embodied in the civilization of Mesopotamia, which embraced the Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Akkadian, Arab and Islamic civilizations, and was a centre of international cultural enlightenment.

Human civilization is the same anywhere and at any time. It is the real expression of human particularity. There is no superior or inferior civilization. Every civilization has its own components and particularities. Therefore, interaction among civilizations contributes to their mutual enrichment and to building common bridges for human prosperity.

In order to arrive at an effective and serious dialogue among civilizations, there are some basic principles on which it must be based. The first principle is respect for basic human rights, paying due regard to cultural diversity on the basis of respect for human values and equality among peoples and the acceptance of this diversity as an inherent characteristic of human society. This dialogue must be based on tolerance, respect for people's religious values, renunciation of discrimination against certain civilizations, respect for people's decisions in choosing their social, political, economic and cultural systems, the creation of a democratic international economic order — which should not be the preserve of one Power, for controlling the world's destiny and channelling it to serve its national interests — an order based on justice and the rules of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

The dialogue should not be marked by the concepts of force or the threat of its use. In his message of 29 October 2001, addressed to the peoples and Governments of the West, President Saddam Hussein stated that the world needs justice and equity, not the use of force because of potential and opportunity.

The most meaningful lesson we must learn is the one about God's directives. If we disagree on the understanding of God's directives, then what we like for ourselves should not prevent us from allowing others to like and enjoy what they choose. What we do not want for ourselves, what we reject, should not compel us to apply double standards against others.

We should all realize that a wealthy person cannot lead a secure life in the midst of a hungry society. His or her misfortune will be worse if he or she exploits the hungry, increasing his or her fortune at their expense.

The Secretary-General's report refers to many activities conducted within the framework of the United Nations in the area of support for the concept of dialogue among civilizations. Yet now more than ever, the world needs the United Nations and its institutions to redouble their activities to encourage dialogue and deal with the recently emerging trends that call for classifying civilizations and religions in a manner that impedes all human or civilizational dialogue and promotes conflict among civilizations.

We look forward to the day when the United Nations, as the main forum that voices the concepts of the civilized world, can make this cultural diversity the basis of interaction in order to achieve the mutual enrichment of all human civilizations.

Over the ages, Arab and Islamic civilizations have embodied the concept of dialogue among civilizations. Given the daunting challenges ahead, the Arab and Islamic nations are prepared today to continue their historic mission of carrying out interaction with other civilizations in an atmosphere of respect for the cultural diversity of all peoples, belief in the inevitability of cultural exchanges and rejection of the concepts of arrogance, pride, aggression and foreign occupation.

Mr. Alcalay (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Let me first express our gratitude to the Islamic Republic of Iran for having taken the initiative of promoting dialogue among civilizations in such a suitable place as the United Nations. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, and his Personal Representative, Mr. Giandomenico Picco, for their work to promote this topic and to give it priority on the Organization's agenda.

The commemoration of the International Year of Dialogue among Civilizations shows that this is a topic that belongs to each and every one of us and in which we must participate actively. Today, when the very concept of dialogue is threatened by unjustifiable actions and motivations that are beyond rational comprehension, it is more important now than ever to look at the United Nations role in promoting understanding of various ways of seeing life. Fortunately, this was recognized when the Secretary-General and the United Nations were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. There can be no doubt that understanding among nations is nothing other than peace — peace with a capital letter.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan promoted this vision when he observed in his report (*A/56/523, para. 15*), that

> "the United Nations remains the natural home of dialogue among civilizations; the forum where such dialogue can flourish and bear fruit in every field of human endeavour. Without this dialogue taking place every day among all nations — within and between civilizations, cultures and groups — no peace can be lasting and no prosperity can be secure."

Beyond our linguistic, ethnic, religious or cultural differences, the very essence of the human being — the essential value of humanity as a whole — continues to be the guiding light and the common denominator that characterizes us and distinguishes us from other living beings. It is this essence, imbued with the desire for peace and the harmony among nations, that inspired the creation of this Organization and is the point of departure for dialogue among civilizations.

More than 500 years ago, the course of history changed with the encounter of two worlds. This fact marked the identity of what today is Latin America, which is characterized by its rich diversity, giving it a specific historic personality. Diverse mixtures of peoples have been superimposed on this identity, which has sometimes complicated its achievements. The process of mixing peoples, far from being static, has today taken on a dynamic that, while surprising, remains fragile.

In accordance with the United Nations decision to consider 2001 as the International Year of Dialogue among Civilizations and because of the personal interest in this topic of our own President, Hugo Chávez Frías, at the beginning of this year, the Government of Venezuela began to take the initiative to promote activities and meetings both at the national and at the regional level, which addressed the idea of dialogue among civilizations.

Among other activities that are planned is the important meeting of Latin American and Caribbean countries that will soon be taking place in Caracas, from 13 to 16 November — of course, we will bring the conclusions of that meeting to the attention of the General Assembly. The purpose of the meeting is to promote various forums for sustained reflection throughout the region, to prompt debate and to study the changes that affect us on the cultural level, just as has occurred in other regions of the world within the framework that has taken shape as we carry on this dialogue among civilizations.

We have to reclaim cultural diversity as a constructive contribution to meeting the serious contemporary challenges as well as a way to deal with the risks of homogenization that are inherent in globalization. The Caracas meeting will also demonstrate the interest of the Latin American and Caribbean region in contributing in an proactive way to the worldwide dialogue here in the United Nations, and reaffirm the need for us to redouble our efforts to achieve international peace and cooperation.

The phenomenon of globalization brings with it an instrument of and an increase in international relations and greater interaction among various cultures, which can yield great benefits. It is a process that not only relates to economic, financial and technological areas, but is increasingly taking on a marked cultural dimension. It poses a tremendous challenge to us — the preservation of and respect for the rich intellectual and cultural diversities of our peoples.

This is one of the conditions that we have to fulfil in order to achieve the balance we need to take up this challenge, so that globalization itself can benefit us. As was indicated in this world programme of Dialogue among Civilizations, information technology must be used to promote the message of dialogue and understanding throughout the whole world in order to disseminate historical examples of constructive interaction among various civilizations. The current circumstances in the world have done nothing but

confirm all the more the relevance of promoting and activating such dialogue.

Allow me to refer to what was said by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Venezuela, Mr. Luis Alfonso Dávila, in the context of activities relating to the International Year that are taking place here and also in Caracas. He said the national preparatory meetings for the regional summit, which are taking place right now, must be turned into a new mindset that accepts diversity. This is the key to our action. We have to accept ourselves as being different. This is how we can project unity. Such diversity must be perceived as constituting an opportunity to recognize what is new and what is different, not as a threatening challenge to our own values and distinctiveness. Dialogue among civilizations must be founded on the belief that the humanist spirit can transcend obstacles caused by ignorance and prejudice.

In conclusion, it is the inherent right of the human being to be different from others and to live in peace with his fellow man — this is the best kind of humanitarian dialogue that we can reaffirm in this forum.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): My delegation welcomes this important debate on the subject of dialogue among civilizations. We are grateful for the report of the Secretary-General, which, while brief, is lucid and focused in its presentation of the subject. We acknowledge the role and contribution of the Secretary-General's Personal Representative, Mr. Picco, and the Group of Eminent Persons in this regard.

The convening of this debate is most timely indeed in the wake of the 11 September terrorist attacks against the United States and the stereotyping of terrorism with a particular group of people or religion, in some circles. This stereotyping is very unfortunate, and we are therefore profoundly grateful to President Bush and other Western leaders in their very categorical rejection of the identification of Islam and Muslims with terrorism. Islam stands for peace and seeks peace through civilized interaction and dialogue among peoples and nations. This is evident from the first and last words of greetings or salutations by Muslims, "*Assalamu alaikum*" or "Peace be upon you". Clearly, the heinous acts carried out on 11 September by people who were identified as Muslims have tarnished the good name of this great world religion and have done a great disservice to it. Islam has been hijacked by a group of desperate and misguided people in pursuance of their own political and personal agendas.

Some years ago, a Western scholar, Samuel Huntington, alarmed the world when he suggested that the development of world politics was heading towards a clash of civilizations, specifically between Western and Islamic civilizations. Whatever the motivations of Professor Huntington were in making that prediction, he himself said in a recent interview that he would not wish to see the fulfilment of that prophecy in the wake of the 11 September terrorist attacks, and he has called for a constructive dialogue between the West and the Islamic world.

A clash between these two major world civilizations, each of which has given so much to humanity, would be a great tragedy for the entire world. It must be avoided at all costs. It was for this purpose, and to create greater understanding among civilizations — particularly between Islam, which is very misunderstood, especially in the West, and the other world civilizations — that the Islamic Republic of Iran, under the leadership of President Seyed Mohammad Khatami, initiated this civilizational dialogue process, which led to the adoption of the Tehran Declaration of May 1999 and culminated here in the designation of the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. For this we are profoundly grateful to Iran and its farsighted and inspired leadership.

It is a sad commentary on human affairs that, in spite of the advances made in science and technology, humankind remains prisoner to the ancient prejudices and suspicions of our ancestors, as evidenced by the stereotyping and caricaturizing of other peoples, religions and cultures in every country and society simply because of differences in skin colour, facial features, customs and religions. Herein lies the importance of the process we have launched at the United Nations with the proclamation of 2001 as the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, which, if pursued conscientiously and in the spirit in which it was conceived, will have positive and far-reaching effects on human society.

The United Nations has a direct interest in the success of this dialogue among civilizations for the simple reason that the process will contribute to greater understanding among countries and peoples, thereby

contributing in a concrete way to world peace. It is a process in which the Organization is a natural constituency and a major stakeholder. It is a confidence-building measure par excellence that can be an important factor in efforts of the United Nations to forge global understanding and harmony in the context of a better and more peaceful world. In fact, at the sectoral level, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is very much involved in this process. We commend and continue to encourage its efforts in this regard.

The initiative and efforts to promote civilizational dialogue should be strongly supported by the international community. Indeed, given the gulf of differences and prejudices that exist among human civilizations even into this twenty-first century, there should be not just a Year of Dialogue among Civilizations but a decade or decades or even a century of dialogue among civilizations.

To a large extent, the failure to recognize the importance of constructive dialogue and interaction among peoples has led to the eruption of ethnic or religious conflicts in countries that had seemingly been united and cohesive for decades. As a multiracial and multireligious nation, Malaysia is fully conscious of the inherent risks of rupture in the social fabric, which has, in fact, occurred and traumatized us in the past.

Fortunately, drawing upon the lessons of the past, we have been able to forge a united nation out of our diversity through policies that propagate tolerance and understanding among our people of diverse ethnicity, cultures and religions. We are mindful that in a country where Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and other religions coexist in general harmony, the balancing of ethnic, religious and cultural sensitivities cannot be taken for granted. Cross-cultural and religious dialogues are consciously nurtured, promoted and strived for. Together, the different ethnic, cultural and religious groups have been able to harness their combined strength for economic uplifting and nation-building, while not forgetting their spiritual development.

Since then the Government has made great efforts to ensure that there is racial and religious harmony in the country through dialogue and interaction among the different ethnic groups in Malaysia, beginning at the school level, in the context of building a united Malaysian nation. In this regard, the Government has taken a number of institutional measures, such as establishing the Ministry of National Unity, the Institute of Islamic Understanding and the Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, as well as other forums devoted to cross-cultural interaction, activities and dialogue among the people. We believe that through these policies and measures Malaysia will continue to be a nation that lives up to the concept of unity in diversity.

It is indeed heartening to note in the report of the Secretary-General that major events and activities have been organized to support the international Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. We commend the Governments of Austria, Germany, Japan, Uzbekistan, Lithuania and others who have been in the forefront to promote the theme of dialogue among civilizations in various related programmes. We congratulate the School of Diplomacy and International Relations of Seton Hall University for having been selected as the secretariat for one of the most significant projects of the 2001 United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. The United Nations University has also organized a series of workshops, conferences and other events, including an essay contest for children, entitled "Dialogue Beyond Borders".

In the aftermath of the tragic events of 11 September, it is now more important than ever that we take concrete steps to promote further dialogue and understanding among peoples and civilizations and to achieve as soon as possible the goals set out in the Millennium Declaration, which stands as a testimony to the renewed global commitment for peace and development.

My delegation welcomes the fact that the Secretary-General's report has highlighted the important nexus between the dialogue among civilizations and globalization. Globalization presents both challenges to and opportunities for the process of civilizational dialogue. It is up to us, the international community, to meet the challenges and exploit the opportunities in the interest of ensuring that globalization will contribute to the strengthening and consolidation, not to the weakening, of human civilization. Malaysia entirely agrees with the Secretary-General that it is

> "critical that globalization not reflect the triumph or victory of one ideology or cultural or economic system over another". (*A/56/523, para. 16*)

We all must ensure that the benefits of globalization are more equally distributed so that the injustices that are so often linked to the process are not seen to be affecting only certain groups of people. Globalization and dialogue among civilizations should go hand in hand; the latter can help to ease the frictions that may be engendered by the former.

The President returned to the Chair.

Too often, we have seen how misunderstanding and distortions about a nation, culture or individual have led to suspicion, mistrust, fear and prejudice, culminating in intolerance, misunderstanding, conflict and even war. It is thus important for the international community to begin in a concerted and coordinated way to promote, encourage and facilitate dialogue and understanding between various cultures and civilizations, thereby promoting peace, tolerance and cooperation.

Towards that end, my delegation considers the draft global agenda for dialogue among civilizations that has been submitted for our consideration to be a serious, forward-looking and concrete effort in that direction. We fully endorse the contents of the draft resolution, in particular its ambitious but realistic programme of action. The successful implementation of the programme of action will depend on the commitment of and effort made by all Member States. However, the United Nations has a vital role and interest in ensuring its success for, after all, the concept of dialogue is congruent with the basic purposes and principles of the United Nations. Indeed, dialogue — which includes discussions and negotiations among representatives of nations — is the raison d'être of this Organization.

Mr. Manalo (Philippines): We thank the Secretary-General for his report on the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations and we thank the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran for its initiative in advancing our discussion on this important item. It is very timely that, this year, we are celebrating the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

The terrorist attacks on 11 September and the subsequent loss of human lives are a constant reminder that peace continues to elude us. Though the attack manifested the worst of humankind, it triggered a wake-up call for the international community on the need to strengthen dialogue, to advance cooperation and to strengthen the foundations of our common aspirations for the future of mankind.

My country has had its share of adversity and we have resorted to dialogue as a means of breaking geographic, cultural and social barriers. The Philippines has a rich but culturally diverse society; hence, the necessity of dialogue to promote national unity. Our Government has launched programmes and projects formulated through constructive dialogues to enhance understanding and mutual esteem among our people of varying ethnicity, cultures and languages. These programmes have not only improved our appreciation of the values, symbols, meanings and expressions distinguishing these different cultures in the country, but have also helped to sustain cooperation and respect within communities. A similar process is needed at the global level.

However, in the Philippines as in other parts of the world, there remains an urgent need to ensure that we do not retreat from the process of cultural or civilizational dialogue, tolerance and respect. Elements in our society continue to sow distrust by emphasizing differences in ethnicity and/or religion as reasons to promote violence rather than understanding and cooperation.

When our heads of State came together last year for the Millennium Summit, they reaffirmed the need for dialogue as the way to preserve peace. They shared a vision that the international community must advance towards a world of peace, security, stability and prosperity. To prevent more conflicts in the future, it is increasingly evident that dialogue among civilizations is essential. As the Secretary-General has said,

> "we must be able to take care to promote dialogue without creating new boundaries, and advance cooperation without stifling integration".

The United Nations continues to be the bedrock upon which the dialogue among civilizations should take place. Over the years, progress has been made in this area because this Organization has helped promote tolerance and understanding. It has the potential of taking further concrete steps in demonstrating how dialogue can bind us rather than polarize us. The various international conferences and exchanges on promoting dialogue among civilizations held this year can yield practical steps towards this end. In this regard, we welcome the launching of the book *Crossing the Divide: Dialogue among Civilizations* by

Mr. Picco and the eminent persons appointed by the Secretary-General, since it tackles the new paradigm of global relations through dialogue.

Some have noted that, since the 11 September attacks, our world faces a more uncertain future. This need not necessarily be true. However, the temptation for exclusionism and mistrust remains strong. We must resist this temptation by working vigorously to heal real and perceived differences. Bridging cultural divides through dialogue and cooperation remains the best way of doing so.

We must eschew the "us" and "them" syndrome and the stereotyping of people and cultures. Isaiah Berlin wrote that one source of conflict is stereotypes. Neighbours hate neighbours by whom they feel threatened and they rationalize their fears by representing them as wicked or superior. But stereotypes are just a substitute for real knowledge, only generalized images and stimuli to disdain of other nations and cultures.

Drawing from a pool of different cultures and civilizations, we are bound together by the urgent need to address our shared burdens: the deprivation and indignity of poverty, the vast pockets of underdevelopment, the degradation of the environment, the existence of conflict and the silent cry of the victims of famine and disease. The need to address these universal challenges transcends cultural differences.

Let us not forget that the purpose of the celebration of 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations is to embrace the interdependence of humankind and its rich cultural diversity. The choice before us is clear: We must endeavour to work together in dealing with the common scourges that continue to plague our world. The globalization of economic and cultural forces and increasing interdependence only reinforce the necessity of dialogue and cooperation so that the benefits of globalization are not limited to the few.

As another well-known writer has argued, all cultures are involved in one another, none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated and unmonolithic. No one can deny cultural geographies and differences in languages, but there seems to be no reason except fear and prejudice to keep on insisting on their separation and distinctiveness. Recognizing that will go a long way towards harnessing the dialogue among civilizations as a means to create a future of peace and prosperity for all.

Mr. Kadirgamar (Sri Lanka): On behalf of Sri Lanka, I should like to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session. You are the Minister for Foreign Affairs of an Asian country, the Republic of Korea, with which Sri Lanka has long had the very best of relations. You have the fullest cooperation of the delegation of Sri Lanka, and I wish you the greatest success in all your endeavours in guiding the destiny of this Assembly.

Allow me also to congratulate President Khatami and the Government of Iran on their most praiseworthy initiative in urging the General Assembly to proclaim 2001 the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. When this idea was first mooted in 1998, there were those who wondered whether that initiative could lead to any practical results. Today, I do not think a single dissenting voice can be heard. Indeed, the terrible events that occurred in this very city two months ago have underscored dramatically the paramount need for the world to commence and sustain a serious and informed dialogue among civilizations.

Throughout the history of mankind, religion has divided man. Religion has put man against man. Religion has led to the most abominable crimes committed in the long history of warfare. It has led to intolerance, bigotry, ignorance and superstition. Yet religion should be the great unifying force in the lives of men. The search for truth should be illuminated by the teachings of the great religions of the world. And so it would be, if we approached religion — the religions of other peoples — with an open mind and an attitude of respect.

In Sri Lanka, four of the great religions of the world — Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity — coexist, and have coexisted for many centuries, in constructive harmony. In every city and deep in the countryside of Sri Lanka, Buddhist temples, Hindu kovils, mosques and Christian churches exist side by side.

It was therefore with confidence that Sri Lanka proposed in 1998 that the Day of Vesak — the day on which, according to tradition, Gauthama, the Buddha, was born, achieved enlightenment and passed away — be observed in the United Nations system. The draft

resolution to that end was presented by Sri Lanka and sponsored by 34 other States — Christian, Buddhist, Muslim and socialist — from across the globe. Thus, the international community united to honour the name and the teachings of one of the great spiritual leaders of mankind. The Buddha was a prince of peace. He preached tolerance, love and compassion. His message, enunciated 2,500 years ago, brought solace, peace of mind and understanding of the human condition — initially to millions of people in South Asia, East Asia and South-East Asia, and now to hundreds of millions of people all over the world.

I wish today to raise for our consideration the issue of the place of religion in the dialogue of civilizations, for it is religion that has underpinned all civilizations from time immemorial. I believe that we at the United Nations, where all nations assemble, and where all nations jointly seek to address the common problems of mankind, must focus our attention on bringing to the peoples of the earth greater awareness of the similarities in the teachings of the great religions of the world. Then we will realize that religious beliefs should, indeed, unite the peoples of the earth and inform them in their common search for truth, rather than divide and confuse the followers of each faith.

Unfortunately, for most people, faith in their own religion seems to kill even interest in other religions. The followers of each religion feel called upon to make their religion an article of export. They would drive all souls into the same spiritual enclosure. They are unaware of the great loss to humanity which would follow the imposition of any common creed on all. The supersession of the different religious traditions would make this world a poor place. Have we the right to destroy what we have not learned to appreciate? It is spiritual vandalism to drag into the dust what is precious to the soul of a people — what has been laboriously built up by the wisdom of ages.

In the course of a series of lectures delivered at Oxford between 1936 and 1938, Professor Radhakrishnan, the eminent Indian philosopher — the first Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at the University of Oxford, and later President of the Republic of India — demonstrated, with abundant citations from the ancient texts, that the life and teachings of Jesus Christ as recounted in the Gospels bears a striking resemblance to the life and teachings of Gauthama the Buddha.

Similarly, there are many parallels between Krishna and Jesus. As with the teachings of the Buddha and Jesus, a comparison of the Bhagavad Gita with the Koran reveals striking similarities, although those two scriptures are separated by perhaps as much as 1,000 years.

If the great religions continue to waste their energies in a fratricidal war, instead of looking upon themselves as friendly partners in the supreme task of nourishing the spiritual life of mankind, the swift advance of secular humanism and moral materialism is assured. In a restless and disordered world which is unbelieving to an extent which we do not sufficiently realize, and where sinister superstitions are staking their rival claims to the allegiance of men, we cannot afford to waver in our determination that the whole of humanity shall remain a united people, where Muslim and Christian, Buddhist and Hindu shall stand together, bound by common devotion, not to something behind, but to something ahead, not to a racial past or a geographical unit, but to a great dream of a world society with a universal religion of which the historical faiths are but branches. We must recognize, humbly, the partial and defective character of our isolated traditions and seek their source in the generic tradition from which they have all sprung. Among the great religions there are similarities and dissimilarities. Does it not behove us to promote unity among them rather than to perpetuate division?

Each religion has sat at the feet of teachers who have never bowed to its authority; this process is taking place today on a scale that is unprecedented in the history of humanity, and this will have most profound effects upon religion. In their wide environment, religions are assisting each other to find their own souls and grow to their full stature. Owing to a cross-fertilization of ideas and insights, behind which lie centuries of racial and cultural tradition and earnest endeavour, a great unification is taking place in the deeper fabric of men's thoughts. Unconsciously, perhaps, respect for other points of view, appreciation of the treasures of other cultures and confidence in one another's unselfish motives are growing. We are slowly realizing that we need believers with different opinions and convictions in order to work out the larger synthesis which alone can give the spiritual basis to a world brought together into intimate oneness by man's mechanical ingenuity.

We must endorse, support and take forward the initiative of Iran in this Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. The United Nations has an immensely valuable role to play in that process.

Mr. Moreno (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are beginning the millennium with the celebration of the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, an excellent initiative that we owe to President Khatami of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Yet this is also the year of the barbarous terrorist acts of 11 September, and the one in which the civilian population of one of the poorest countries on earth — in addition to the serious violence it has experienced in the last 20 years — is being severely affected by intensive aerial bombardment.

It has therefore never been as important as it is today for there to be a true dialogue among civilizations that can bring about mutual understanding, tolerance, coexistence and international cooperation. One of the great challenges before the United Nations is to promote a positive perception of diversity and to enhance the role of the United Nations as the appropriate forum for dialogue in all spheres of human activity.

Unfortunately, we remain far from achieving that objective. International reality shows that those who brandish global power and wealth, particularly the hegemonic Power, do not have the political will to promote true equal opportunity and real justice for all human beings of all nations, ethnic groups, cultures and religions. They are even less able to promote the solution of very complex international problems by means of a dialogue that makes it possible for interlocutors of all nations and groups of countries to be considered on an equal footing.

Real possibilities for underdeveloped countries — which are the vast majority of the world — to have an effective voice in international decisions are ever more distant. How can those countries participate effectively in international relations when for them poverty and hunger are spreading, development potential is diminishing, millions of people are dying from curable diseases and illiteracy rates are not being reduced?

The 1.3 billion people living in absolute poverty in the third world, the 200 million malnourished children under the age of 5, the 130 million children who do not have access to education and the 840 million illiterate adults in the countries of the southern hemisphere continue to live in hopelessness. For there to be a solution there will have to be considerable improvement in international cooperation and serious consideration will have to be given to the voice of those countries belonging to that forgotten world. If it is not recognized that the poverty, underdevelopment, social exclusion, economic disparity, instability and insecurity that affect millions of people have been the result of historical injustices that can be overcome only through a serious commitment to international cooperation, we will never break out of the vicious circle of marginalization, death, suffering and violence. If we do not break out of that vicious circle, there will be no diversity. If there is no diversity, there will be no effective dialogue among civilizations.

Our Organization must become the framework that brings about diversity — including political, ideological and cultural diversity — and that makes a decisive contribution to changing the unfair, unequal and exclusive order. The United Nations should be the framework that sets up a true and expansive dialogue among civilizations and cultures. It must become the guarantor of that diversity, and of ending the imposition of cultural and ideological values. It must tear down barriers to truly fruitful dialogue.

However, we are very far from that. Opting for the path of war to combat terrorism, as despicable and condemnable as it may be, has cheated the United Nations of its function of peace and dialogue, which are its reason for being. Instead of creating the conditions for a fitting and fruitful dialogue among civilizations, that choice can also lead to new conflicts, differences and instances of intolerance that will create additional barriers to our goal.

Dispelling any notion of cultural or ideological superiority based on racism, racial or other discrimination, xenophobia or intolerance should be a corollary to a dialogue among civilizations. For instance, we believe that the World Conference against Racism, which was held recently in Durban, South Africa, is an example of how we should identify phenomena that must be overcome by means of a comprehensive and wide-ranging dialogue. We hope that the General Assembly will take this aspect into account when it comes time to reach conclusions on this topic.

In conclusion, I can assure the Assembly of the full cooperation of my country in achieving the

objectives of the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations and in enshrining respect, tolerance and recognition of multiculturalism as the undisputed ways of achieving those objectives.

The President: In accordance with the decision taken by the General Assembly at its 40th plenary meeting, on 8 November 2001, I now call on the observer of the Holy See, Archbishop Renato Martino.

Archbishop Martino (Holy See): My delegation wishes to express its gratitude and appreciation to President Khatami for the laudable and timely initiative to promote dialogue and understanding among peoples.

My delegation also wishes to express its appreciation to Mr. Giandomenico Picco, Personal Representative of the Secretary-General. I hope that the book *Crossing the Divide: Dialogue among Civilizations*, which is the fruit of his efforts, will be translated into many languages so that it can become a good instrument of dialogue.

In his message for the World Day of Peace celebrated on 1 January this year, Pope John Paul II wrote of the urgent need "to reflect on the theme of dialogue between cultures and traditions", with this dialogue being

> "the obligatory path to the building of a reconciled world, a world able to look with serenity to its own future. This is a theme which is crucial to the pursuit of peace ... [T]he United Nations Organization has called attention to this urgent need by declaring 2001 the 'International Year of Dialogue among Civilizations'".

The impact of the brutal and unprecedented attacks of 11 September are forcing all of us to consider the urgency of the dialogue among civilizations and to intensify our hopes as this International Year of Dialogue among Civilizations draws to a close. To do anything less would only allow for the perversion of the very idea of civilization. As the recently published report of the Secretary-General on this agenda item indicates, "A dialogue among civilizations is not only a necessary answer to terrorism — it is in many ways its nemesis" (*A/56/523, para. 19*), and the very existence of this Organization is a testament to the deep human desire for justice and peace. The terrorist attacks must make the United Nations not only reconsider, but also recommit and resolve itself to, this dialogue.

In last year's resolution on the dialogue among civilizations, the General Assembly noted

> "that civilizations are not confined to individual nation-States, but rather encompass different cultures within the same civilization, and ... that civilizational achievements constitute the collective heritage of humankind, providing a source of inspiration and progress for humanity at large". (*Resolution 55/23, third preambular paragraph*)

In recognizing the plurality and relatedness of the world's cultures and civilizations, this body thus admitted the vital role that culture, as a subset of each civilization, must play in the drama that is every human life.

"The main concern of culture in general and of all culture is education." Addressing man in his moral, intellectual and spiritual capacities, authentic culture is rooted in the search for ultimate truth. In the recesses of his heart, man seeks to discover both his origins and his ultimate destiny. In many respects, culture is the means by which whole communities of people come to meet God and to ask life's fundamental questions. It is this common search for truth that forms the basis of culture: "At the heart of every culture lies the attitude man takes to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God."

As personal as this search is to the human heart, it naturally expresses itself in and through the customs and traditions of whole communities of people who, through their relative proximity to one another, have sought the ultimate meaning of life together as a people. The first experience of living together is found in the family, a universal experience whose importance can hardly be overstated. The family provides the basis of an essential relationship between the individual and one's origins. In the family, individuals also come to maturity through receptive openness to others and through generous self-giving to them.

Moreover, there is a close connection between the particular culture of a people and its identity as a nation. "History shows that in extreme circumstances ... it is precisely its culture that enables a nation to survive the loss of political and economic independence." Not even the powerful ideological systems of colonialism and totalitarianism were able, and neither will terrorism be able, to suppress the universal need for a particular and unique cultural life.

It may seem that any particular culture that is taken seriously raises strong and definitive claims to truth: in a sense, each culture may say that its way is the way, to the exclusion of all others. This determination may even seem to give cultures a certain force. Yet such overly simplistic claims have led, and, sadly, continue to lead, to strife and conflict between peoples, not to mention the number of inhuman and barbarous acts against human dignity, dubiously justified in the name of "culture". All cultures must bear some relationship to freedom and truth. Fanaticism and fundamentalism cannot be equated with the search for truth itself.

A true dialogue between cultures requires a respect for differences. Much too often, both in history and at the present time, ethnic and religious differences have been used as a justification for brutal conflict, genocide and persecution. There have also been problems in which one religious group has sought to expel members of another religion from a country, often with threats and actual violence. Authentic culture cannot be built upon the practice of religious persecution. Such a so-called culture stands diametrically opposed to the human person and will eventually lead to the disintegration of society.

Meaningful dialogue among civilizations cannot take place in the absence of religious freedom. The cultures of the world, with all of their rich diversity of gifts, have much to contribute to the building up of a civilization of love. What is required is mutual respect for differences among cultures — respect inspired by the desire to uphold the right of all individuals to seek the truth in accordance with the dictates of their conscience and in continuity with their cultural heritage.

Human beings are not enslaved by the past. They cannot disregard the past or recreate themselves in any way they wish, but they do have the capacity to discern and choose how they should live, both as individuals and together. They are free enough to accept the limitations imposed by various historical, cultural, economic or other conditions. These conditions may constrain but cannot abolish their freedom. As a part of human nature, freedom, especially the freedom to choose dialogue and peace, is always possible.

After the recognition of a variety of cultures and civilizations, one is bound to ask: what unifies mankind? The answer proposed — and affirmed by the United Nations — has been those universal rights which human beings enjoy by the very fact of their humanity. It was precisely outrages against human dignity which led the United Nations Organization to formulate, barely three years after its establishment, that Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which remains one of the highest expressions of the human conscience of our time.

As Pope John Paul II stated in his address to the General Assembly in 1995:

> "These are not abstract points; rather, these rights tell us something important about the actual life of every individual and of every social group. They also remind us that we do not live in an irrational or meaningless world. On the contrary, there is a moral logic which is built into human life and which makes possible dialogue between individuals and peoples. If we want a century of violent coercion to be succeeded by a century of persuasion, we must find a way to discuss the human future intelligibly. The universal moral law written on the human heart is precisely that kind of grammar which is needed if the world is to engage this discussion of its future." (*A/50/PV.20, p. 3*)

My delegation would like to conclude with a final reflection on the relationship between civilization and recognition of the value and dignity of human life. No authentic dialogue can take place if it fails to respect life. There can be no peace or dialogue among civilizations when this fundamental right is not protected. There have been many examples of generosity, dedication, even heroism in the service of life in our time. Yet the world is still plagued by a number of attacks on life. When the human dignity of the weakest and most vulnerable members of society is not duly recognized, respected and protected, all civilizations suffer.

Yet again, despite these terrible practices and the recent crises, mankind must not be discouraged. The very idea of dialogue presupposes our ability to reason and understand, and especially to change and make anew. The Holy See has full confidence that a true dialogue among civilizations will serve to benefit all.

The President: In accordance with the decision taken by the General Assembly at its 40th plenary meeting, on 8 November 2001, I now call on the Observer of Switzerland.

Mr. Staehelin (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Over the course of its history, Switzerland has had to invent and constantly reinvent ways of living together. The coexistence of different cultures, religions and traditions does not just happen but, instead, requires constant effort. Now that the world has become what is commonly called a global village, what is true within our borders is equally true beyond them. That is why Switzerland immediately felt it must respond to Iran's initiative of the dialogue among civilizations. From the beginning, Switzerland wanted to contribute to the realization of this great idea, hoping to put its relevant experience at the service of others.

The tragic events of 11 September and their consequences further emphasized, if it were necessary, the importance of this dialogue: it must take a central role today if we are to prevent a worsening of the lack of understanding and prejudices existing between our civilizations, which some might exploit.

First, allow me to make some general observations on this subject.

Norms, values, religions and traditions define a civilization as they create a collective identity and a shared feeling of belonging. These norms and the feeling of belonging also help structure the personal identity of individuals, who know their way around and understand each other inside their collective society. Accordingly, we can see how strongly individuals identify with the society in which they live. The dialogue among civilizations therefore concerns each of us.

However, personal identities and civilizations are not fixed quantities. Societies invent and reinvent themselves. They reshape their conceptions of the world. They do this not only independently but also, if not mostly, in response to one another. This ongoing process can be destabilizing. That explains the tendency towards isolation, the rejection of the other and the rejection of others' civilization and values, which are sometimes interpreted as threatening or incompatible with one's own vision of the world.

That is why dialogue is necessary in order to abate as much as possible the lack of understanding that fuels resentment, which can in turn lead to conflicts between different civilizations.

It seems to me that human civilizations have more points in common than fundamental differences. Those similarities are even more evident in an age when reciprocal influences are increasing. So, should not one of the principal goals of the dialogue we wish to undertake be to give more prominence to the constituent elements of humanity's common heritage? Respect for human dignity and the fundamental rights of humankind are undoubtedly a key element of this common heritage.

Dialogue among civilizations, a factor that is key to peace and security — indeed, 2001 is the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations — is, for Switzerland, of utmost importance. It is too important to remain simply a concept or a vague aspiration; it must be translated into reality. For this Year of Dialogue truly to effect change, it will have to make itself felt in the everyday lives of our countries' citizens. With this goal in mind, Switzerland has for several years endeavoured to encourage dialogue between people of different civilizations and religions, specifically between Christians and Muslims.

Allow me to recall certain of our initiatives.

In response to President Khatami's proposal, Switzerland launched, in cooperation with Iran, a project involving dialogue between the citizens of our two countries. That project addresses the role of women in the education, communications, health-care and legal fields. Its goal is to promote an ongoing exchange of ideas and information between the civil societies of our countries. Furthermore, at the opening of the annual session of the Economic and Social Council, Iran and Switzerland decided to express symbolically their cooperation by organizing in Geneva a joint concert by the National Orchestra of Iran and the Geneva Chamber Orchestra, which performed together the works of Iranian and Western composers.

This year, Switzerland also backed and helped to organize in Algiers, together with the Algerian Government, a symposium on St. Augustine, who was born and lived in what today is Algeria. Together with the Algerian authorities, Muslim and Christian associations took the floor, as did scientists and researchers of various nationalities. Other related cultural activities were also held, such as exhibitions and concerts, which ensured the tangible impact of this initiative.

It is clear, then, that Switzerland, through these initiatives, intends to promote the implementation of concrete projects. I can assure the Assembly that

Switzerland will continue to encourage and support a dialogue among individuals and societies during these difficult times.

Our country's history has convinced us that there is no alternative to an ongoing attempt to reach consensus through dialogue, on the basis of respect for differences and for the identity of the other. Hence we are convinced that the world must become increasingly aware, through dialogue, of the richness that its differences give it.

The President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 33/18 of 10 November 1978 and decision 53/453 of 18 December 1998, I now call on the observer for the International Organization of la Francophonie.

Mr. Bouabid (International Organization of la Francophonie) (*spoke in French*): In 1999, at the eighth Conference of Heads of State and Government of Countries Using French as a Common Language, held in Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada, la Francophonie chose the theme of "Dialogue among cultures" for its ninth Conference, which was to be held in Beirut from 26 to 28 October 2001. However, given the international situation prevailing in the wake of the events of 11 September, that Conference had to be postponed until next year.

This attests clearly to the keen interest shown by the French-speaking world in the proclamation by the General Assembly of the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

For la Francophonie — a community of peoples and cultures from all continents — dialogue among civilizations, dialogue among cultures, and dialogue plain and simple are not exceptional occurrences, but everyday facts.

The promotion of an open-minded, pluralistic approach to culture and civilization has always been at the core of our community's concerns. Dialogue is the only way to cope with an international society in which the most diverse identities complement one another, to the benefit of one and all. It is only natural, therefore, that the Charter of la Francophonie enshrines as one of its fundamental goals the promotion and intensification of dialogue among cultures and civilizations.

For us, dialogue presupposes going beyond mere tolerance of diversity. We believe that it should be viewed, rather, as a constituent part of our own identity. This means also that we should perceive and appreciate individual characteristics as different aspects of that which is universal. Dialogue, inasmuch as it presumes equality despite differences, and convergence despite differences of opinion, aims — above and beyond an exchange that is merely verbal — to understand the other. Current events reaffirm — as if that were necessary — the need to continue along this path.

Guided by a very broad definition of culture, la Francophonie has sought to make dialogue among cultures into a specific project based on the full acceptance of differences in all aspects of life, including at the international level.

Among other things, it has endeavoured to devise new ways of working together towards coherence and harmony among cultures, in the context of shared complementarity. Indeed, many threats emanating from hegemonic aspirations are looming over various civilizations. A few powerful players — both public and private — are seeking to control legal and normative resources and to determine what is legitimate, while also attempting to fabricate an imaginary uniformity and to promote the homogenization of ways of being, behaving and consuming. The resurgence of identities has demonstrated, however, that humankind rejects uniformity. Globalization is leading us towards coexistence, and we welcome this. But this must not keep us from also living in our own, different ways.

To live ever closer to one another while deriving a mutual benefit from our differences: this is one of the major challenges of this new century. While some have felt compelled to predict inevitable confrontation, today it is clear that the international community is aware of the critical importance of dialogue among civilizations and of the full unfolding of the diversity of cultures.

The adoption last week by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity is proof of this. Article 1 of the Declaration, as the Assembly is aware, stipulates that

> "Cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and

should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations."

La Francophonie thus wishes to engage in this conceptual exercise along with the Arab world and with Portuguese, Spanish and Russian speakers, so that this debate can gradually be expanded to include all the members of the international community.

Thus, in the context of preparing for the Beirut summit, the International Organization of la Francophonie organized a variety of events related to a dialogue among cultures and civilizations, including the following, which I will use as an example.

On the occasion of International Francophonie Day, a symposium entitled "Three linguistic communities faced with the challenges of globalization" was held in Paris on 20 and 21 March last. That dialogue, which brought together the Portuguese-, Spanish- and French-speaking communities, was inaugurated by President Chirac of France, President Chissano of Mozambique and President Noboa Bejarano of Ecuador. Multiculturalism and identity, culture and the economy, and a scientific, knowledge-based society were the three themes that commanded the attention of those involved. Among its conclusions, the symposium strongly recommended elaborating an international instrument for the protection and promotion of cultural diversity.

Earlier on, in May 2000, another such event had already allowed for the inception of a dialogue with another linguistic community: the Arab world. A symposium organized by la Francophonie, the League of Arab States and the Arab World Institute, entitled "La Francophonie and the Arab world: a dialogue among cultures", made it possible to identify points of convergence and possibilities for synergy, notably to foster diversity, tolerance and the use of new information technologies among the communities involved.

Last month, again, during a seminar in Paris organized jointly by the International Organization of la Francophonie and the Council on the Russian Language — an agency of the Government of the Russian Federation — agreed to give priority to cultural diversity among the areas earmarked for cooperation between the two organizations in the future.

Finally, from 13 to 15 June of this year, la Francophonie held its third Ministerial Conference on Culture in Cotonou, Benin. The heads of State and Government of French-speaking countries entrusted that Conference with the mandate of exploring in greater depth the problems of globalization in terms of cultural diversity, as actually experienced by the members of our organization. By a declaration adopted on that occasion, la Francophonie reaffirmed the principle of the primacy of cultural diversity and its determination to adopt policies and instruments likely to foster that diversity.

The Ministers of the French-speaking countries also decided to support the proposal to draw up a universal international regulatory framework to promote cultural diversity, seeking thus to enshrine the right of Governments to maintain, establish and develop policies aimed at supporting cultural diversity.

The ninth Francophonie Summit, to be held next year in Beirut, will surely mark a high point, but it will not mark the end of the dialogue among cultures for la Francophonie. We will always cherish, on one hand, progress towards a better world and, on the other hand, safeguarding the cultural wealth of each of our societies.

For us, this is a current project, as well as a future one. It is a social project on a global scale; a project to achieve a society in which cultures and civilizations complement rather than exclude one another; in which they strengthen rather than dilute each other; and in which they become closer without becoming the same; a project with the final objective of a truly multipolar world, respectful of the most vulnerable and their right to solidarity, respectful of a truly democratic management of international relations.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 25.

I would like to announce that since the publication of draft resolution A/56/L.3, the following countries have become sponsors: Andorra, Australia, Belarus, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, Guatemala, Hungary, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Madagascar, Maldives, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines, Poland, Qatar, the Republic of Moldova, San Marino, Slovakia, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of

Macedonia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and the United States of America.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/56/L.3, entitled "Global agenda for dialogue among civilizations".

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/56/L.3?

Draft resolution A/56/L.3 was adopted (resolution 56/6).

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 25?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 6.40 p.m.